

Western Lake Erie Historical Society Presents:

AYC

ASSOCIATED YACHT CLUBS

100

YEARS

## **A Celebration of History**

The Associated Yacht Clubs or AYC was formed in Toledo, Ohio at the end of April 1925. This year we celebrate the incredible 100-year anniversary of its founding. Few things are maintained with such strength and such a wealth of good stories. AYC is an institution that has endured because of great dedication from decades of committed sailors and their beloved clubs throughout western Lake Erie. This article intends to be a celebration of history, relating the state of the five founding clubs and the stories of their leadership one hundred years ago.

## An Early Attempt - A.B.C.M.V.

It should first be recognized that prior to 1925, there were previous attempts to form an overarching governance to aid in the cooperation of the various clubs in existence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the spring of 1914, six Toledo area clubs met within rooms of MRYC and voted to form the Associated Boat Clubs of the Maumee Valley. Long standing and familiar institutions such as Maumee River Yacht Club, Ottawa River Yacht Club, and Toledo Yacht Club sat at table with now only shadowy memories of the past - Lone Star Boat Club, Toledo Power Boat Club, and Riverside Boat Club. The purpose of this organization was of course to promote yachting within the city and as the nation's growing sport, govern inter-club regattas, and provide permits in safety and hailing signals to local sailors.

Lone Star Boat Club was an upriver institution in the general environment of MRYC. They were particularly prominent in ice boating. The Toledo Power Boat Club would operate under that name another decade before officially changing their name to Bay View Yacht Club in 1923. Lastly among the now defunct clubs, Riverside Boat Club held court at the city boathouse downriver at what is now Jamie Farr Park in Toledo. Both BVYC and RBC will feature prominently in the 1925 story of this article below.

**TOLEDO YACHT CLUBS  
FORM A COMBINATION**

Toledo now has an inter-club yachting organization, known as the Associated Boat Clubs of the Maumee valley. The organization was perfected on Tuesday night at the meeting of delegates from the six local clubs at Maumee River Yacht clubhouse.

These officers were chosen: President, Percy C. Jones, Maumee River Yacht club; vice-president, L. A. Alexander; Toledo Power Boat club; secretary, Earl Shanteau, Ottawa River Yacht club.

The object of the new organization is to promote yachting here and to hold frequent local regattas between local clubs. Toledo Yacht Club, Maumee River, Riverside Boat, Lone Star, Toledo Power Boat, and Ottawa River Yacht clubs are the organizations interested.

The United States squadron permit, which will give local tars a permit them to exchange nautical signals with big boats and provide greater safety for small craft in the bay, was discussed. If the Toledo clubs take up the proposition, Toledo may be made a district headquarters. The district would extend east to Put-in-Bay and north to Monroe.

**Headline—Toledo News Bee—May 13, 1914**

The Associated Boat Clubs of the Maumee Valley elected for their first president Percy C. Jones, son of famed Toledo Mayor Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones. The area yacht clubs of the time were indeed populated with many of the city's elite and a scion of such a renowned civic leader would be right in step with the health of, and enthusiasm for, yachting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Percy Jones had deep connections with both the Maumee River Yacht Club as well as the Toledo Power Boat Club. Vice President of the organization was W.G. Alexander, an aging salt and Civil War veteran who had just completed back-to-back terms as Commodore of the Toledo Power Boat Club. Elected as the Secretary was Earl Shanteau, founding member of the Ottawa River Yacht Club and a giant among their leadership for decades.

This first attempt at a grand organization would be short lived however as the 1910s would prove to be a troubled time for sail racing. 1914 alone, the year of founding, would see three tragic deaths as a result of racing, the shock causing excitement to wane. Two teenagers of the Lone Star Boat Club would be killed in an ice boat collision in March. The annual race for the Mills Trophy would see its first fatality that year with the loss of Kid Wild, something of a sailing celebrity from Detroit and a media darling. Ultimately it was World War I that starved clubs of memberships and crews for the boats. Even though the United States would not enter the war for a few years, the armed forces began to expand in preparation and by 1917 all the sailors were gone, or the ink was still wet on draft cards throughout the Great Lakes.

## 1925 - The Year

“The business of America *IS* business.” So said newly elected President of the United States Calvin Coolidge in the first inaugural address ever broadcast live on the radio – a new technological wonder gracing the homes of a few Americans. And business in America was indeed booming. The “Roaring Twenties” as they became known was a period of fast and robust economic growth. The stock market was soaring, and many Americans were becoming comfortably if not vastly wealthy. Six years earlier the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment had gone into effect, prohibiting the production, sale, and transportation of alcohol. While known as the “Roaring Twenties” the nation was also in the throes of the “Prohibition Era”.

In January of 1925 was the Great Race for Mercy, an attempt to get a vaccine antidote all the way out to Nome, Alaska before a diphtheria outbreak destroyed the entire community. The delivery would have to be made by the only means possible in such a cold and icy winter, by dog sled. The incredible triumph of its success was a sensation that captivated the United States and would be the inspiration for our modern Iditarod Race held each year over roughly the same course.

In the arts, jazz legends Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong would make their first recordings. F. Scott Fitzgerald would publish *The Great Gatsby* – perhaps the most looked to narrative to define the entire era. And a revolution in the film industry, Charles F. Jenkins would synchronize pictures and sound for the first time.

Closer to home, the City of Toledo proposed massive spending bills in 1925. This money would go to improve city parks, which included Riverside, Walbridge, and Bay View Park – all prominent homes to the boating community.



### Frank R. Frey (1863-1939)

If there was one man chiefly responsible for the formation of AYC it would be Frank R. Frey of the Toledo Yacht Club. He had already served two terms as Commodore of the TYA (Toledo Yacht Club under a different name [1893-1903]) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (1898 & 1899) but it would be as an outstanding club manager and financial and recording secretary that he would serve in his greatest distinction for TYC over the next three decades. His resume listed in *The Toledo Times* speaks to his value and accomplishments:

"Without doubt the most widely known yachtsman of the Great Lakes region is Frank R. Frey, secretary and business manager of the Toledo Yacht Club. He has been a conspicuous figure at all the prominent regattas for years past; is a splendid organizer and has done more to elevate and promote nautical sports than any other man in this part of the country...In an official way, he has been secretary and Vice Commodore of the old Toledo Yacht Club, secretary-treasurer of the Yacht Racing Union of the Great Lakes, organizer, sec/treasurer of I-LYA and of the Toledo Yacht Club Building Company, secretary of the Inter Lake Cruising Club, two time commodore of the old TYA. Chairman of the Vencedor-Canada Race, the international event held in Toledo. He is energetic and an organizer of ability, and the development of all Bay View Park improvements was largely due to his work."

Frank Frey was a sailor and though not an ace who raked in trophies and a slew of first place finishes, was a constant presence in the club races of Maumee Bay and elsewhere. He had been sailing since age nine and built his first boat the *Alert*, a 23-footer, at age 17. In the days when club managers resided within the clubhouse itself, Frank Frey was asleep in his bed on the night of February 4, 1907, when he was awakened by the great fire that

would destroy the grand new clubhouse at Bay View Park. While he and his family escaped the blaze, within an hour he would be standing in his underwear, in the snow, beside the pile of ash - all that remained of the fleet, the array of priceless trophies, and three stories of southern colonial grandeur.

Secretary Frey was so talented in his role as organizer and manager that he was pirated by the Detroit Yacht Club in 1912. Moving his family to Michigan, he would spend a decade there overseeing race and club operation. He learned a lot during his time and saw the value in how the Detroit River clubs interacted and governed their regattas as well as how the various clubs could support the overall boating community as a whole. He would bring this knowledge as well as the desire to see the same success employed for Toledo upon his return in late 1924. It would be he who sent invitations to all the surrounding clubs and called the grand meeting for Monday, April 27th, where the alliance would be made and the name Associated Yacht Clubs would be chosen.

## The Associated Yacht Clubs (of Toledo)

There were five founding clubs present at the meeting of April 27, 1925. The meeting was held at the Toledo Yacht Club. The concept and the purpose would be agreed upon. The organization would work for the promotion of sail and power boat races, work for the interest of *all* the clubs, and to arrange non-conflicting dates for the season's races. Incorporation complete, officers were to be elected for the first time at the following meeting, Monday May 4, again at TYC.

Prior to this, the various big race regattas had been held on a basis of usual past practice. Typically, the season had opened with Decoration Day festivities and races on the upriver course hosted by Maumee River Yacht Club. There would be a big weekend of events over July 4<sup>th</sup> at the Monroe Piers. Toledo Yacht Club often led races in mid-August and somewhere sailors would find a season closer over Labor Day. But there was nothing to stop clubs from shifting events to suit their purposes and suddenly you saw MRYC hosting a July 4<sup>th</sup> contest or TYC scheduling races the last weekend in May. This divided the sailors on where to compete causing smaller races and less competition which led to less public spectacle. Sailors deciding between two clubs offering races on the same date often went towards where the larger cash prizes were at stake or where the larger trophies were given. This meant that wealthier clubs could begin marginalizing the smaller community clubs. This could all be avoided with an overarching government body with equal representatives from each club.

The five founding clubs were: **Maumee River Yacht Club, Toledo Yacht Club, Ottawa River Yacht Club, Bay View Yacht Club, and Riverside Boat Club.** The first elected officers were as follows:

Officers:

Commodore - Theodore Schmitt, TYC

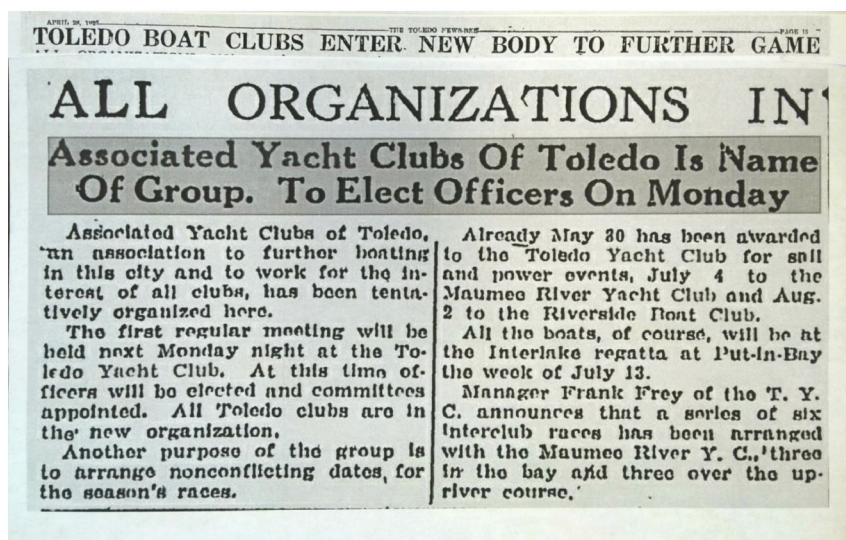
Vice Comm. - Earl Shanteau, ORYC

Rear Comm. - Jack Knipper, RBC

Treasurer - Edward Litton, MRYC

Secretary - Frank Frey, TYC

Fleet Captain - W. H. Cooper, BVYC



**Tuesday, April 28, 1925—First ever appearance of the name AYC in Print. Toledo News Bee**

## The Five Founding Clubs - A History and Snapshot of 1925

### Riverside Boat Club (1912-1944)

In 1893 the City of Toledo spent \$211,000 to purchase a number of land parcels for the purpose of expanding the city's public park system, a very popular movement for urban centers in the late nineteenth century. The land purchased on the northwest side of the river just downstream from downtown was not officially named but was commonly referred to as "the terrace walk on lower Summit Street". The name "Riverside Park" was already in use for the public area beside the river adjacent to the Toledo Zoo.



In 1896 this greenspace was renamed "Walbridge Park" in honor of John Walbridge, the man who had donated the land to the city for public use (his son was also the sitting chairperson of the City Parks Commission). The title "Riverside Park" was transferred to the lower Summit Street property the same year and a public boathouse was erected on stilts with a causeway connecting it with the land. The park occupied a high flat bluff between Galena Street and Ohio Street. The public boathouse's anchorage area was utilized by the fleet of the Toledo Yachting Association until 1903 when they moved into new accommodations just downriver at another city park, Bay View Park, which had been established with the same land purchase in 1893. Likewise, the same anchorage was the original home of the Toledo Power Boat Club from its founding in 1905 until 1907. Within a few years the park had fallen into disrepair due to general neglect by the city. Riverside Boat Club was founded in 1912 as a neighborhood boat club made up of small boat owners who lived in the vicinity of Riverside Park. The group struck a deal with the city that they would overtake the care and upkeep of the park in exchange for use of the boathouse as their official meeting place and launch.



**RBC burgee pin**

*photo courtesy of Tom Crites*

In 1925 the club was skippered by Commodore Jack Knipper, a sailor who commonly just went by Knipper. His name appears as a first-place finisher in many races throughout the early twentieth century and therefore a respected captain. Knipper was elected as Rear Commodore of AYC in the first class of 1925.

Riverside Boat Club slowly faded with less membership and less activity over the years. Throughout the 1930s one could still see the club entering a scant few boats in nearby races, particularly powerboat runs, and the club steadfastly held on to a tradition of hosting a large children's picnic on the Fourth of July. It was World War II that really killed RBC with the area largely devoid

of the young men who could maintain the local fleet. The last occupants of the boathouse were a group of elderly men who formed a cardplaying club on the same arrangement with the city. They would care for the park and house in exchange for use of the building. Their renovation abilities were limited and ultimately the boathouse was demolished in 1944.

## Ottawa River Yacht Club (1910-present)

Ottawa River Yacht Club was a well-established club in practice long before they officially incorporated in 1910. Commillus Earl Shanteau (1888-1962) was a founding member and absolute lion of their leadership for decades



**Photo is alternately credited as 1912 Or 1920**

**Courtesy TLCPL—Images in Time**

leading towards the club's involvement with AYC. Shanteau had been integral to the previous attempt at alliance in 1914 under the auspices of the aforementioned Associated Boat Clubs of the Maumee Valley. The many time commodore was born in Point Place (not far from the current clubhouse on Edgewater Drive.) He would found the Toledo Sales & Engine Company and also work as a foreman at the landmark Willys Overland Company. In 1925, as commodore of ORYC, he hosted a family reunion attended by over 300 family members coming from as far away as California! As delegate to the first class of AYC, Shanteau would serve as the Vice Commodore.

A very popular and successful outfit, ORYC had the largest membership and largest fleet both in 1914 and 1925 of any of the area clubs. At the time, as perhaps today, the membership was highly involved in ice boating.

## Bay View Yacht Club (1905-present)

Originally formed under the moniker Toledo Power Boat Club in 1905, this group was dedicated to learning, teaching, and developing the delicate and temperamental nature of early marine engines. In 1907 they secured a lease from the city on land at Bay View Park. Winter storage and a marine railway established, the club at length was able to complete their clubhouse by the end of 1911.

1925 would be a rebuilding year. The club had seen a massive drop in membership and a bruised reputation all due to a rum-running scandal in the early 1920s. Part of the club's rehabilitation was a re-branding to the name Bay View Yacht Club in 1923. The new name gave the outfit a fresh start and was more

inclusive - reflecting the fact that many sailboats were tied up in the expanding harbor. BVYC's commodore in 1925 was Hugo "Hugs" Boelter (1875-c1935). Little is known regarding this gentleman. He emigrated to the United States from Germany as a boy of 12. His employment is listed alternately as carpenter and draftsman. Later in life he worked as a dress pattern maker supporting his sister's home-based business in Toledo producing women's clothing. His involvement with Bay View can be traced back at least a decade prior to him being named commodore. Evidence suggests he was a key player in the construction of the clubhouse.

The AYC officer elected from BVYC was William Cooper. He would serve as the Fleet Captain for the new organization. Also in 1925 he was serving as the financial secretary for Bay View Yacht Club.



**Cmdr Boelter's Flagship Winona**



**One of these ten gentlemen believed to be Hugo Boelter**

**BVYC Archives**

## Maumee River Yacht Club (1899-present)

From humble beginnings at the public docks at the foot of Congress Street in Toledo, by 1925 MRYC had grown to a respected giant dominating the upriver scene. In that year, Neil S. Larsen (1885-1959) was in the middle of a three-year stint as commodore. Ultimately, he would serve six terms as headmaster. Alongside the aforementioned Percy Jones, these two men would sculpt the prosperous and helpful leadership in the first decades of the twentieth century, securing the estate and establishing the modern clubhouse.



**Marked 1913—this image more likely from mid 1920s—TLCPL**

Neil S. Larsen was also the long-time president of the Toledo Auto Club. For years this rather land based organization had lobbied hard to have a bridge built over the mouth of the Maumee River, so motorists could completely bypass Toledo on route to Detroit. When the city of Toledo balked, the outfit pursued building and owning the bridge privately, and they almost succeeded. Eventually, a compromise was reached and Larsen worked hard to complete the project with new civic partners. In 1929, Larsen with others, turned the first shovel of ceremonial dirt for the building of the Toledo's High-Level Bridge, a two-year project that saw Larsen drive over it in 1931.

No stranger to breaking ground, Larsen was also present when the clubhouse for MRYC was begun in 1911 as a modest 40ft x 25ft plan. He had also been integral in the founding of the Heatherdowns Country Club in the heart of the city's south side.

Edward Litton of the Maumee River Yacht Club would serve as the treasurer at the inception of the AYC.



**Neil S. Larsen—MRYC**

## Toledo Yacht Club (1878-present)

As has already been stated in this article, the impetus for the formation of AYC was largely due to the tireless efforts of Frank Frey, manager and secretary of the Toledo Yacht Club. As a result, no doubt, TYC would operate largely at the heart of AYC in its early days. The meetings were held there and Toledo's 1925 commodore, Theodore Schmitt Jr., would also be elected as Commodore of the Associated Yacht Clubs, serving two consecutive terms in that chair. Owing to his extreme talent as Secretary to numerous organizations, Frey would also occupy the secretarial chair for the AYC in the years to come. TYC was the only club to fill two bridge positions in the opening year.



**Theo Schmitt Jr.—TYC**

Following the devastating fire in 1907, Toledo Yacht Club would erect the fifth clubhouse in the organization's history on the exact footprint of the former. It opened to the members in 1908 after an electrifying membership and money raising campaign championed by the remarkable Frank Frey. In 1925 they were enjoying their 17<sup>th</sup> year in the concrete structure still standing today. The traditional harbor for many of the city's elite, the club's choice in commodore for 1925 would be no exception. Theodore Schmitt Jr. (1883-1935) was the general manager of the Mutual Savings Association of Toledo. This was the only largescale bank operating in 1920s Toledo (there were five) that was

an original homegrown product of the city and its citizens. Schmitt's father (also Theodore) was the owner and chief executive of the inter-urban rail line that ran from Marblehead to Toledo. The younger Schmitt was a commissioned officer (Lt. Senior Grade) in the United States Naval Reserve. His flagship vessel, the *Pal II*, was a recognized site on the various long cruises throughout the Great Lakes.

The 1920s were a decade of optimistic growth for TYC. They hosted the first official AYC regatta and race weekend over the long May holiday in 1925. Also that decade, the club would develop their land holdings at Bay View Park, rebuilt and reenforce the sea wall surrounding the clubhouse and commons, and install their first "recreational swim tank" or pool. In 1927 the City of Toledo's large spending bill would take fruit in the digging and opening of the "80 foot cut" - which still serves as the entrance to the harbor for both Toledo Yacht Club and Bay View Yacht Club.



**Toledo Yacht Club**

- *JOHN HC THOMPSON*

BVYC CLUB HISTORIAN

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For space consideration, an extensive citations page has been omitted. For a list of sources please contact the author.

## WESTERN LAKE ERIE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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